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MICHAEL ANGELO

From the painting by Michael Angelo — Photo Braun (Clément)

THE ERYTHREAN SIBYL

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MICHAEL ANGELO

by George Fromen

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MICHAEL ANGELO

BY DR. GEORG GRONAU

THE chapel in the palace of the Vatican is called by the name of its founder, Pope Sixtus IV., of the della Rovere family (1471-1484). Built by a Florentine, Giovannino de Dolci, it was dedicated by the Pope to Maria Assunta on August 13, 1483.

Architecturally, the chapel is of the greatest simplicity. The side-walls, interrupted by few windows, were obviously intended by the builder for a rich decoration in fresco. The altar is seen before one of the narrower walls, Michael Angelo's *Last Judgment* afterwards filling the space above it. The tribune or balcony seats for the choir are placed against the wall on the right-hand side. The chapel is divided by marble rails into two parts, the one intended for the clergy, the other for the laity.

The long side-walls are partitioned by horizontal cornices into three sections. Painted tapestries fill the lowest of these. Later on, Pope Leo X. intended that Raphael's tapestries should occupy this place. The second section is filled by frescoes painted during the years 1481-1483 by Rosselli, Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, Perugino, Pinturicchio, and Signorelli ; these frescoes are typically connected, and depict scenes from the life of Moses and the life of Christ. Above these frescoes, separated from them by a small gallery, and alternating with the windows, is a series of likenesses of the Popes, works of Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, and others.

Over these, and about eighty-eight feet above the floor of the chapel, a low barrel vault serves as roof. Its outline is broken by the pointed arches above each window, and where these arches meet at the four corners of the roof concave triangles are formed with their points downwards. This ceiling, with its special architectural limitations, and originally painted with gold stars on a blue ground (such as may still be

seen in more than one Italian chapel), Michael Angelo was called on to decorate in 1508 by Pope Julius II., the nephew of Sixtus IV.

Michael Angelo took up the work with great reluctance. For one reason, it meant his giving up his monument of Julius II., and he was also possessed of the idea that painting was not in his line. During his lifetime he thought himself to be but a sculptor, felt that he was a sculptor, just as Leonardo was always a painter. Many years later, when he was telling his pupil, Condivi, the story of his life, he spoke bitterly of this moment; when an intrigue of Bramante's literally forced him to undertake the task. And when he thought of what he might have produced in marble, during that same period, his work almost seemed to have been in vain.

In fact, it seems that it was through the intrigues of Bramante that Michael Angelo was compelled to undertake the decoration of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. But whatever harm he may have plotted against the great master who had not had the practical experience adequate for such a gigantic task, that harm turned to Michael Angelo's triumph, and was the genesis of the most magnificent picture cycle of modern times.

There are symptoms which let suppose that as early as 1506 Julius II. had conceived the idea to confer upon him this undertaking. But the idea ripened but two years later. On May 10, 1508, Michael Angelo began the work, as an autograph record tells us. A decidedly simpler scheme was at first thought of. This is how Michael Angelo himself spoke of it in later years: "In the earliest plan for this work it was meant to paint the twelve Apostles in the lunettes, and the rest of the space was to have been filled with ornamentation, as is usually the case. However, after I had begun the work it had a poor effect, and I told the Pope that if I had the figures of the Apostles only I thought the result would be a poor one. He asked me why, and I gave him this answer, 'The Apostles were poor men themselves!' Then he gave me a new order. I was to do what I liked and he would be content, and I was to paint down to the pictures on the wall below."

This is the true account of the early history of that work; only one preparing sketch is in existence (an Apostle in a niche—in the British Museum) to give us an idea of the original scheme.

Meanwhile, Michael Angelo tried to work with assistants whom he had chosen from amongst the best painters in Florence. But he was not a man who cared to work with others, and after a short time he freed himself somewhat brusquely of his companions. From that time, except for just the necessary workmen, he carried out the work alone. About 350 figures have been counted on the ceiling. It seems almost beyond human power, more especially as this work was finished by him in a comparatively short space of time. About September 1, 1510, "the painting of the coved part of the ceiling was almost finished." Then the work was stopped by an interruption lasting many months; early in

1511 Michael Angelo began the decoration on the spaces between the windows and on the lunettes, and on the evening before the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin (August 14) in this same year the finished portion of the ceiling was uncovered, and a solemn service was held in the chapel by order of Julius II. In October 1512, Michael Angelo was able to tell his father of the completion of the work, and that "the Pope is quite content with it."

"Do just what you like!" This is what the Pope had said to the artist, and therewith had spoken the magic word of freedom which Michael Angelo needed. His imagination teemed with forms and figures which he shortly before had hoped he might have permission to carve in marble. Those figures of the Apostles which were to have been placed in the cathedral in Florence, the manifold statues, which he had intended for the monument to Julius II., could now, though naturally in a different form, be painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. No one can avoid noticing the close connection—both in the form and in the idea—between the designs for the monument and for this painting. In each are seated powerful figures in silent loneliness, youthful forms in the nude appear in both works, also semi-architecturally adapted figures. Even the actual architectural outlines are closely allied. Thus Michael Angelo's great design—too great, in fact, ever to have been carried out—may be said to celebrate its resurrection.

He has partitioned the ceiling in the following manner: In the triangular spaces formed by the combination of every two of the arches above the windows he has painted niches—twelve in all—in which figures of sibyls and prophets are seated. A cornice with bold profile runs the whole way round above these niches, forming at the same time a border to the long narrow rectangular space in the centre of the roof. Infantine figures are arranged in pairs on square pilasters adjoining the niches. Across the ceiling from niche to niche are painted arches two and two, dividing the central part of the ceiling into nine larger and smaller spaces, in which the artist tells the history of the Creation and of the early beginnings of the human race.

All these architectural details, with the exception of the groining of the arches above the windows, are merely painted, but seen from below they stand out as if really carved in stone. Michael Angelo has made no attempt to surprise by an optical delusion in perspective, nor to draw the gaze of the spectator to unmeasured depths, as did many a celebrated decorator of the seventeenth century—such as Padre Pozzi and others. But, all the more, each niche and its surroundings, all in correct perspective, produce a better effect upon the observer. To the painter himself the architectural scheme was a mere detail, the figures were of the chief importance. A century later the trend of opinion was in the opposite direction.

Michael Angelo had had no great predecessors amongst the painters

who had given representations of the history of the Creation ; but this subject, which is essentially suitable for sculpture, had been undertaken in an original and striking manner by two sculptors, both of whose works were well known to him : Ghiberti's first relief on the second door of the Baptistery in Florence, and Jacopo della Quercia's reliefs on the portal of S. Petronio, Bologna. The Sienese sculptor's seriousness and candour must have made a great impression on Michael Angelo, and in Ghiberti's work he liked the bright attractive grace lacking in his own.

However, these two artists had not depicted what is evidently beyond human power—the Creator of the world occupied in separating the elements out of chaos; and it is in this that Michael Angelo's amazing power of conception has produced its highest work.

First we see the Almighty alone and as though gently hovering in mid-air ; He seizes masses of clouds with both arms, and they resist with solid heaviness. It is an illustration of the first day's work in the Book of Genesis—" the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters."

In the second picture, the Creator approaches on a whirlwind. His mantle is inflated, cherubs are carried in its folds. Forward and backward movement is suggested, and by the outstretched first finger the work of Creation is accentuated : here appears the sun, and there the gentle light of the moon. An angel covers his eyes with his hand before the unwonted brightness.

Michael Angelo has depicted the Creator twice in one and the same work, hastening downwards, with back turned to the spectator, and the figure delineated in sharp foreshortening, the limbs drawn close to the body as though in the act of swimming, and the mantle flowing out far behind. Dry land appears at a sign from the outstretched right hand. Of this, Michael Angelo only shows some bushes in the left-hand corner of the picture.

In the third picture, the positive act of Creation is not shown. The Almighty gazes downwards, creating and blessing at the same time, both arms outspread and uplifted. Sea and land are full of living creatures (which the observer has to imagine for himself).

And now, God Almighty prepares Himself to create man—the crown of His work. The colossal figure formed by Him wakes as though from a deep sleep, and in a mechanical involuntary way stretches out his arm towards his Creator, who is depicted as hovering quietly above with mantle blown into massive folds. Inquisitive little cherubs peep over His shoulder, and beneath His arm is seen a woman in angel form—the figure most difficult to understand of the whole picture cycle. Was it the sense of a need of formal contrast that led the master to paint this youthful form ? Did he wish to give a shape to the soul, or to portray man's helpmeet ? We do not know. Reaching beyond the outline of the mantle is the Creator's arm alone, outstretched from the shoulder, with extended first finger as a factor in giving life. Adam raises his arm upwards, and we are involuntarily reminded of the connection of the

electric spark. But putting this idea aside as too novel, it is also too materialistic. It is better (as Iusti has it) to think of a reflection in a mirror. The two arms, nearly within touch of one another, agree with almost mathematical accuracy. "God created man in His own image."

The Creator appears in person once more to give life to the sweetest of His creative ideas—an after-thought needing no separate day of Creation for itself. Ghiberti, amongst Michael Angelo's predecessors, has found a really delightful solution of the problem when he in wonderful outline—a final triumph of the Gothic depth of feeling in the formation of lines—depicts Eve as soaring towards her God. In Michael Angelo's work she is slowly rising upwards, adoration her first instinctive impulse. No outward signs of Divine Majesty are visible, no crowd of angels attend the Creator. He stands on the earth with right arm raised: is it in blessing, or is it in warning? His glance is sad, as if He already sees the sorrow in store for this gentle creature.

We shall never be weary of contrasting the various shapes under which Michael Angelo portrays the Heavenly Father. From the Creator wrestling with chaos to the ancient with the paternal countenance: what a succession of sublime forms! We are almost led to believe that as the work of Creation progresses, there is a momentary lessening of the emphasis of energy, as if the Creator becomes human and almost as if He grows older with the advance of time.

Whoever follows out and thinks over this—we cannot say gradation, but diminution—will gain some idea of what was passing in Michael Angelo's mind while he spent day after day, month after month, in that elevated solitude, with gaze upturned, his hand painting what his mind conceived of the Creator in the most varied and inexhaustible phases. Has Michael Angelo but given lasting shape to the wrestling of his own soul?

We cannot forget his idea of the Old Testament God. For all time he has solved the problem of how to portray the Creator in bodily form.

The connection between the sublime beginnings of the world and of mankind and the thoughts of the Old and New Covenant which had formed the subject of the older fresco cycle in this chapel could only be represented by showing how sin came into the world. Earlier art had produced important paintings of the Fall and of the expulsion from Paradise; we are reminded another time of Quercia, who, at Bologna, had represented the expulsion with a sculptor's accurateness and grandeur of form, and again, in Fonte Gaia in Siena. And how could Michael Angelo avoid bearing in mind the impressive drama Masaccio has painted in the two figures at the entrance of the Brancacci Chapel? One picture combines both scenes, but what a difference between this and that! It is hardly possible they can be the same human beings, those in the height of happiness and yet longing for something more, and these two going away looking like a pair of criminals, with distorted faces of anger rather

than of shame. On the one hand is suggested the rich soil of Paradise ; and, on the other, a barren plain, from whence man can only wring nourishment by severest toil. We should have expected that the last sections of the ceiling would have shown us some favourite scenes from the history of our first parents, such as " when Adam dug and Eve span," or of Cain and Abel. But, instead of this, Michael Angelo gives us scenes from the life of Noah, and with these he closes the first chapter of the history of mankind and begins another.

The destruction of that sinful generation is shown in the fresco of the Flood. This is the only fresco which does not work out its intended effect. The great number of figures had necessarily to be on a small scale : this, when viewed from below, seems as if the artist had made a mistake, especially when it is compared with the colossal proportions of the rest. Hence the ground for thinking that he began his task with this section ; and as he saw the figures were too small when looked at from below, he chose another measurement. Yet it is difficult to come to the conclusion that a man of forethought like Michael Angelo could have made such a fundamental mistake.

Whatever the cause, we must face the fact, that in this case reproduction suggests a more imposing result than the original. Notable work with the Flood as its subject had once been produced before Michael Angelo's day by Paolo Uccello in the Chiostro verde of Santa Maria Novella. But this Quattrocento artist had only used one motif from the destruction of the world—the desperate struggle for life amongst the people themselves. Michael Angelo, on the contrary, lends this subject a gentler tone ; all around we notice scenes of love, love which does not desert mankind even in his misery ; here is a mother carrying her child up the hill, there a man with the body of a youth lying across his shoulders, the old parents holding their arms out towards him. Close by, real human nature is shown in the unfortunate people trying to save their household goods, although they themselves are in mortal peril. These graphic scenes of the struggle for life are placed in the middle distance. This is the richest figure subject of Michael Angelo's early years, and the only one which gives us some idea of what his cartoon of *Soldiers Bathing* (Battle of Cascina) must have been. It is the greatest tragedy in pictorial art.

Noah's thank-offering and his drunkenness conclude the compositions, and these are the two least interesting representations on the ceiling, both as to subject and consequently to its formal production. But the master-hand is seen, even though the subject be poor, in the wonderful delineation of action. With these pictures he makes a connecting-link first between them and the prophets, and on the other hand the decorative figures of the young men, who bear a family resemblance to Noah's sons.

If we consider the pictures in the order of their subject, the four pictures in the corners of the ceiling must attract our first attention. The

shape of the space, a triangle with the point downwards, presented a very great difficulty, which he has overcome with decided cleverness. In each case he has boldly emphasised the central line, thus dividing the space.

The connecting thought in all four paintings is that God does not deprive His people of His protection in moments of danger ; the Brazen Serpent, the death of Haman, Judith, and David are the four examples chosen.

Who could have depicted the contrast between destruction and redemption in a more terrifying or quieting a manner than he has done in the first of these pictures ? On the one hand, a struggling mass of human beings, each thinking of his own safety alone—a multiplied group of the Laocöon, one may say. On the other hand, there are repose and confidence in the gaze directed towards the uplifted symbol. The second of the compositions depicts a man of gigantic size fastened to a cross ; the drawing of this figure is incomparable in its boldness. How grand, too, is the figure of Judith, who, while she covers up the head in the maid's basket with a linen cloth, looks back into the dusky room where the mighty body is lying ! We are reminded in one way of Botticelli's Judith, who exhibits no traces of the ghastly deed, and in another way of Allori's Judith, whose great beauty was all for effect. What nobility Michael Angelo has put in this figure—a woman out of the Heroic ages, in whom not all womanly instincts are dead ! Magnificent surroundings of enormous masses of rock greatly enhance the impression of the picture of David.

To give true value to the rendering of the various single parts of the decoration, we must compare Michael Angelo's work with that of his predecessors and comtemporaries. The theme of the prophets and sibyls whose mysterious sayings were thought to contain references to Christ, had been represented for this reason in art since the Middle Ages. It is to be found in Rome, in the works of Pinturicchio in the apartments of the Borgia ; in the works of Filippino on the ceiling of the Caraffa Chapel in Santa Maria sopra Minerva ; and again in Pinturicchio's work in the chapel behind the high altar in Santa Maria del Popolo. These and others have received full justice when we praised the decorative taste displayed in them. But when we see Michael Angelo's figures, in which his power seems to surpass itself, we feel that he has treated the theme as if he alone had discovered the character of these men in scriptural records and had conferred a visible form upon them. Each of them seems to live in a world of his own. The one knows nothing of the other, and nothing of the world at his feet. They live, only in and through the inspiration contained in their sayings.

In figurative art progress and evolution depend on the relation between type and individualisation. Creative genius begins with the general representation of the human form ; then follows the study of individual

growth ; and an increasing accuracy in its portrayal leads on to mastery over form, and also to a full reception of the truth. The following generation inherits this wealth of knowledge and capacity, and looks round freely, and, in full possession of all earlier experience, seeks to forget the detail in attaining that which is essential.

Both these tendencies are united in Michael Angelo's prophets and sibyls : we may call them the triumph of the portrayal of individuality, and admire them as the highest representation of type. For each of the twelve is individualised with such care as to leave far behind it the older fifteenth-century art, with its devotion to outward effect ; these figures are individualised not only in their age and temperament, but in their general positions, gestures, and the turn of their heads. Even the very manner in which the clothing is draped varies, and each case has its particular treatment, no one motif being repeated. If any one examines in detail—how, for instance, the book or scroll is held in each instance—he will understand, for the first time, Michael Angelo's inexhaustible abundance of ideas.

However thoroughly these prophets and sibyls have been understood even to their innermost being, and however strongly expressed in lasting form, who can find one of these faces of which it can be said that the master saw it in the streets of Rome or Florence ? It is related of Leonardo da Vinci that he followed a particular model about for a whole day so as to thoroughly impress the likeness on his mind, and then in the evening he made his drawing. Michael Angelo, on the contrary, scorned portrait-like studies. Were there still ringing in his ears those words of Savonarola (which he might have heard in his youth) against the artists of his day, who, for their pictures, took this or that well-known young figure as a Madonna or saint ? This was an offence of which Michael Angelo was never guilty.

These twelve figures, however—next to the history of the Creation—are the best work he has done in this place. Here are depicted the noble womanhood and strong manhood of all ages—from Delphica to Persica, from Daniel to Zachariah, what a noble assembly, in which every age finds its representant ! One may take, for instance, the group of the ancients Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Zacharias, the one is passionate, the other wrapped in pained silence, and the third waiting in quiet certainty for what the future may bring. Notice how characteristic is each man's position ; and Michael Angelo has accomplished this, in spite of the twelve-fold repetition of the niches in which the figures are all seated.

There are two children near each of the prophets, children of Donatello's race, with sturdy limbs and vigorous movements. By the different ways in which each stands in its relation to the chief figure some one characteristic is particularly emphasised. What deep and suppressed grief, for example, is suggested by the girl-children near Jeremiah, neither of them daring to disturb the aged prophet's concentration by a single sound !

Michael Angelo has taken the ancestors of Christ as his subject for the decoration of the lunettes. These spaces, limited by the windows, and enclosed by two semi-circles, gave a particular character to the composition. Only seated figures are shown here, most of them in a stooping posture—adapted to the circular space in which they are pointed—man and wife almost facing each other. We cannot deny that there is a certain monotony here, this and the bad lighting prevent a closer study. Yet here again Michael Angelo's inexhaustible powers of imagination are manifested ; the relationship of parents and children lends a great variety to the theme, and as in their temperaments so in their gestures some characteristic quality may always be seen.

The groups in the triangular spaces above the lunettes are of more importance. They are eight in number, their subject being figures in repose. As composition they belong to the best work Michael Angelo has ever done. Amongst them we find the beautiful form of a young woman seated on the ground ; between the paintings of Isaiah and the Cumæa sibyl. She is a mysterious woman, her figure turned directly towards us, her head resting on her hand, her eyes gazing into the distance. What is the inner meaning of these weary melancholy-looking figures ? Do they betoken the disappointment of that tragic mood full of longing despair, in which the greatest of all masters has created what will never pass away ?

The contrast between these groups and the " Slaves," so strongly enjoying life (so full of joy in life ?) is about the same, as between an " adagio " and an " allegro con brio." The " Slaves " are purely decorative accessories, placed above the cornice and are the most remarkable amongst the many architectural figures with which every space is filled. Michael Angelo frequently makes use of the human figure for mere ornamentation, here his creative and imaginative power is rising to its highest. The object of these particular figures is to support the broad bands and festoons which hold bronze medallion reliefs in place over the prophets and sibyls. These reliefs depict scenes which are very hard to recognise. What a wealth and variety of ideas is once again presented to us ! One and the same motif is very rarely repeated in any of these pairs ; there is usually some strong contrast between two figures. Majestic deportment, reminding us of the Greek ideal of a god—as in the figure to the left, above Jeremiah—alternates with a form of Bacchanalian merriment, with limbs moving as though their owner would spring up from his seat in the next moment. Truly a remarkable company to choose for the decoration of the ceiling of a building destined for papal ceremonies. Who would have courage to argue with the Pope who considered the work good, or with the artist who conceived such figures as framework for scenes out of the Bible ?

The Renaissance asserts here and here alone her canon of the human form, with the same authority as the artists of antiquity.

We now ask what effect the whole ceiling has ? As a matter of fact,

we can say it is wonderfully impressive. Michael Angelo has shown considerable tact in entirely subordinating the colouring to the drawing. The tones harmonise perfectly throughout, and we may be sure that this is not merely caused by their obliteration in course of time.

But otherwise the first impression we gain on entering the chapel is one of horror. There, above us are these giants, these solid marble thrones on which they sit, a world of figures multiform and contradictory; no imaginary space, but actual real heavy architecture. It is only by degrees that we rid ourselves of this impression and learn to understand the method in the whole; and with this comes the repose which prepares us for its contemplation. We may, perhaps, regret that this contemplation is made very difficult by the fact that the frescoes are on the ceiling, and indeed real enjoyment of them is attained only by great physical exertion. However, the consciousness that these paintings are the greatest productions of modern times will eventually overcome any such bodily weakness. He who has spent hour after hour in high converse with Michael Angelo's giants will take away with him the glimpse of a sublimity beyond the description of words. This alone will suffice him; and it will be all one to him whether the bold conception of the whole or the freedom displayed by Michael Angelo in the separate parts is in harmony with his personal feeling or not. Before such an artist as Michael Angelo, and such a work as this on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, we can do nothing but bow the head in silent homage—without criticism.

More than twenty years later, Michael Angelo was summoned to paint another work for the chapel founded by Pope Sixtus IV. It was evident that the decoration of the building was complete, there was no space remaining. But the proud consciousness of the possession of greater powers led the men of that age ruthlessly to destroy the works of the older masters. Old S. Peter's fell to make place for Bramante's new edifice, and that there might be room for Michael Angelo's *Last Judgment* three frescoes were obliterated on the altar-wall, frescoes belonging to the Quattrocento, one of them being Perugino's *Assumption of the Virgin.*

The idea was first entertained in the time of Clement VII., who, in addition, wished to have the *Fall of Lucifer* on the entrance-wall of the chapel. At this Pope's death (September 25, 1534) a cartoon of the *Last Judgment*—according to Condivi—was already in existence. His successor, Paul III. (Farnese), followed up the plan with the greatest eagerness. Michael Angelo devoted seven years almost entirely to this work; everything else was given up for it, and the continual urging of the aged Pope gave him no peace. The painting was uncovered on December 25, 1541, and Vasari says "it filled all Rome, yes, the whole world, with admiring surprise."

This *Last Judgment* has not come down to us in its original form. Even in the master's lifetime public opinion was directed against the

nude figures in the painting. The Catholic Reformation brought about the accession of Pope Paul IV. ; it was with the greatest difficulty that he was restrained from utterly destroying Michael Angelo's work, and nothing could prevent him having drapery placed round the nude forms. To Daniele da Volterra (and after his death to one of his pupils) was given the task of painting the necessary garments.

Added to this, the smoke of the incense and of the candles has darkened the painting in the course of time. The colours are entirely changed, and the sharp blue—a fatal colour in older days—catches our eye in a very disturbing way. Nowadays, we must study the composition alone, and try to grasp the master's idea.

It is really difficult to find our way in this fresco, for as to outward appearance only the dimensions of the painting are almost the largest in the world : it shares this honour with Tintoretto's *Paradise* in the great Council Hall in Venice.

Our first impression is always the same : we are bewildered by this multitude of rapidly moving figures which we see opposite us. But on longer observation (reproduction teaches us the same), we see that the whole is arranged in groups which, though separate, are connected.

The ruling idea of the composition is the judgment of condemnation spoken by Christ, and, more than that, He pronounces it in a voice of thunder, while horror seizes those who are nearest to Him. By this means alone can we explain the gestures of the figures standing out in advance of the others, and particularly those of S. Lawrence and S. Bartholomew, at Christ's feet. They cower down as though afraid of being beaten. Even the Virgin Mary with terrified gestures hides herself behind the arm of Christ.

The Saviour is surrounded as with a halo by a strongly emphasised circle of human forms—the multitudes of the blessed partaking of the joys of Heaven : here is Adam, and there Peter as the leader of the choir, these two persons represent the Old and New Covenant. To right and left of this middle group, and extending to the edge of the picture, are similar groups of saints, most of them without particular distinction, only a few having their symbols—we notice S. Katherine to the right, for instance. On the opposite side we see the upright figure of a proud woman, with a girl clinging anxiously to her and hiding her face. But Michael Angelo has put nothing whereby we can explain the object of this group, and this prevents us from discovering its deeper meaning, and we can but content ourselves with the sight of its beauty.

The groups in the lunettes correspond in the same way as the upper half of this composition. Gatherings of angels, sturdy figures of young men, carry the symbols of Christ's Passion. They descend in rapid flight from right and left ; they find the cross and pillar heavy to carry, and brace their limbs against the weight. They take their flight on clouds above the heads of the blessed.

Between the upper and lower portions of the composition—just in the

centre, at Christ's feet—is another body of angels, blowing long trumpets, to call the dead from their graves. Different periods of time are painted here together : close to the resurrection of the body appear the following scenes of punishment and redemption.

Down at the left-hand side the dead are rising from their graves in barren, rocky ground. The bones cover themselves again with flesh ; and slowly, as those who slowly wake from heavy sleep, they raise themselves, one by one, from the ground. The flight heavenwards is not easy ; the weight of the earth seems to draw many of them down. They clamber over the clouds with difficulty, as though climbing mountains ; and, seeking help, they grasp the hands of their companions who have been fortunate in reaching a higher level. We must direct our attention in particular to the group towards the centre, where one man draws up two others by the help of a rosary, while immediately below these a demon is contending with an angel for a human soul.

Thus, then, we have on that side the ascent towards Heaven, and on this the descent of the condemned. These, too, are trying to rise ; but the angels bar the way, and in a hand-to-hand struggle, with blows of the fist, they drive backwards those who were found unworthy. Just in proportion as the ascent heavenwards is slow, so the fall downwards is rapid and dizzy. The most prominent group is that of a man with fixed gaze of despair who is being dragged downwards by the devils.

Now comes the last act of the tragedy : the entrance into Hell. Charon, with well-filled boat, rows the condemned over the stream, and strikes at the loiterers with his oar. They are driven in herds to their destruction in Hell, where demons await them, with evil gestures and outspread claws. Quite in the front, in the corner, Minos stands as judge, with serpents coiled round his body, as Dante describes him. An expression of infinite scorn for mankind is all that there is to read on his brazen countenance.

Of all Michael Angelo's works none have received more praise from his contemporaries, nor more unjust condemnation from posterity, than his *Last Judgment.* It has been regarded as a sort of artistic error, committed by a man who was growing old. His representation of Christ has been censured, and the whole work was only looked on as a revel in the anatomy of movement.

There may be some truth in this opinion, but it suffers from the radical fault, that it is based upon general ideas in part of a mere literary character, and not out of the special circle of formal art. Of course, one cannot expect Michael Angelo to describe the state of the blessed ones with the sweetness of an Orcagna, or in the happy childlike manner of a Fra Angelico, nor must we be surprised to find he has not painted a Christ as Titian, or Vandyck, would have done. In fact, it is essentially wrong to expect a great master to be other than himself. In a great masterpiece we ought to strive to recognise and understand the artist

himself, and not to look for our own ideas. It is said of great creations : *sint ut sunt.*

Indeed, Michael Angelo has seized upon the one moment of condemnation, and there is very little trace, if any, of a feeling of reconciliation. Christ is turning entirely towards the condemned. He has the form of Apollo in the *Battle of the Giants.* His gesture is the same as that of Jupiter sending forth lightning. But the mode of emphasising the moment is what gives this composition its unity—the skill in doing which has only been granted to few artists. It allows the work to have the effect intended by Michael Angelo, which is, that the horror of the Day of Doom should seize on the mind of the observer. The same intention is heard in powerful tones in the Hymn of Thomas of Celano, of which this fresco sometimes reminds us; thus, in Michael Angelo's young days Savonarola had over and over again pointed to the end of all things in words of fire ; and thus Dante had spoken in his immortal *terze rime* of the terrors of the Inferno to the men of his own and succeeding generations, and Michael Angelo's fantasy fed itself on Dante's cycle of representation ; and then from the depth of his inmost soul this world of figures was produced in fresco, which contrary Fate had denied his working in marble. The tragedy of his own life imperiously demanded immortalisation in his art.

If we follow up this thought, can we look at the *Last Judgment* without deep emotion ? What art could take from the human form of greatest moments has here been achieved, and in this work Michael Angelo writes with his brush his last will and testament for his successors, and with it draws to a close that special tendency in art which has its birthplace on the Arno, and whose early exponent was Giotto.

Photo, Braun, Clement

PART OF THE CEILING WITH THE CREATION OF EVE

Photo, Braun, Clément

PART OF THE CEILING WITH THE SACRIFICE OF NOAH

Photo, Braun, Clément

CREATION OF SUN, MOON AND PLANETS

Photo, Braun, Clément

GOD CREATING HEAVEN AND EARTH

Photo, Braun, Clément

GOD SEPARATING WATER AND EARTH

Photo, Braun, Clément

THE CREATION OF ADAM

Photo, Braun, Clement

CREATION OF ADAM (DETAIL)

Photo, Braun, Clément

CREATION OF ADAM (DETAIL)

Photo, Braun, Clément

THE CREATION OF EVE

Photo, Braun, Clément

THE FALL AND THE EXPULSION FROM PARADISE

THE SACRIFICE OF NOAH

Photo, Braun, Clément

Photo, Braun, Clément

THE DELUGE

Photo, Braun, Clément

THE DELUGE (DETAIL)

Photo, Braun, Clément

THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

Photo, Braun, Clement

THE PERSIAN SIBYL

Photo, Braun, Clément

THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

Photo, Braun, Clément

THE PROPHET JOEL

Photo, Braun, Clément

THE PROPHET ZACHARIAH

Photo, Braun, Clément

THE DELPHIC SIBYL

THE PROPHET ESAIAS

Photo, Braun, Clément

Phôto. Braun, Clément

THE SIBYL OF CUMAE

Photo, Braun, Clément

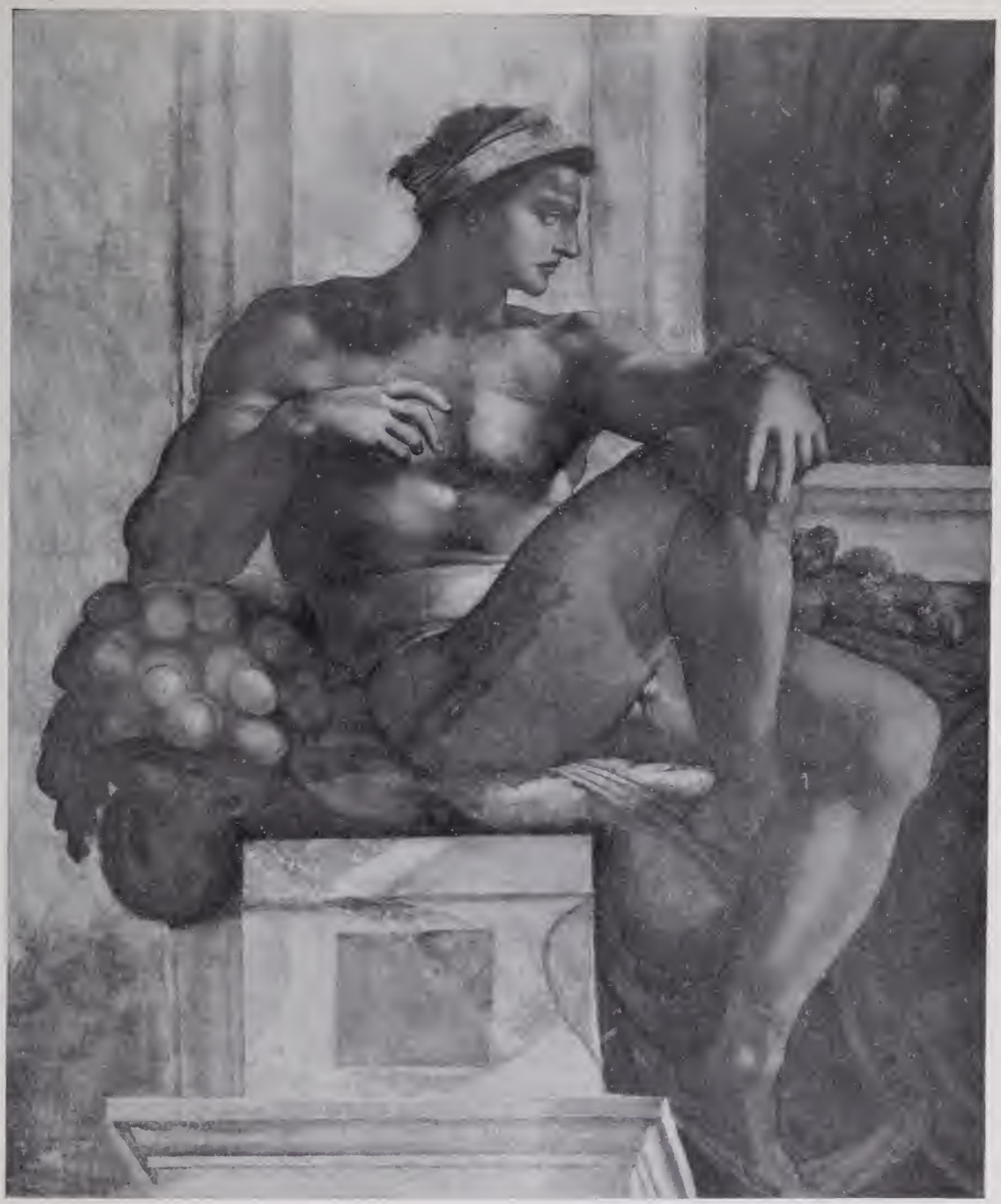
THE PROPHET DANIEL

Photo, Braun, Clément

THE LIBYAN SIBYL

Photo Braun Clement

THE PROPHET JONAH



Photo, Braun, Clément

FIGURE ABOVE JEREMIAH (ON THE LEFT)

Photo, Braun, Clément

FIGURE ABOVE JEREMIAH (ON THE RIGHT)

Photo, Braun, Clément

FIGURE ABOVE THE LIBYAN SIBYL (ON THE LEFT)

Photo, Braun, Clément

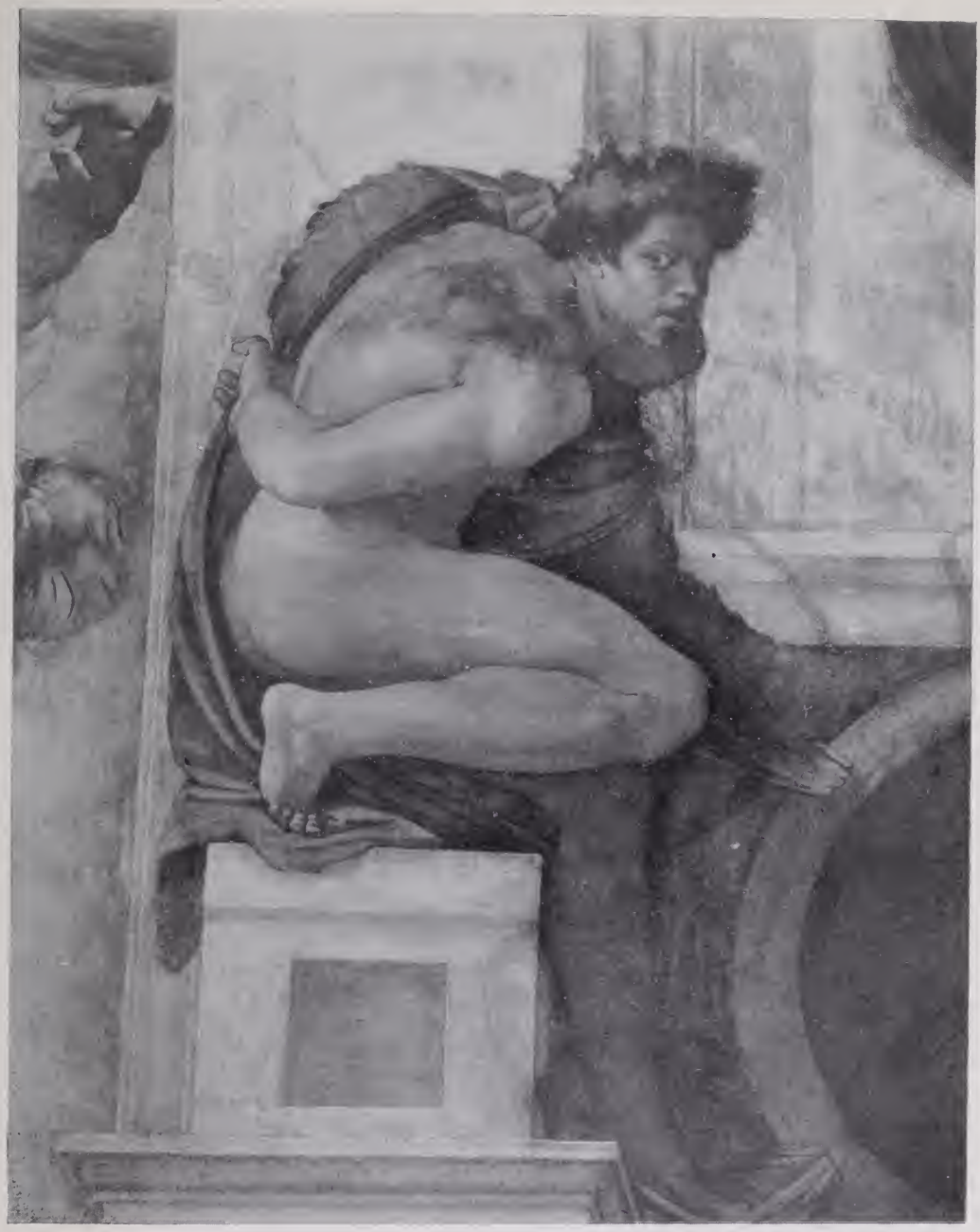
FIGURE ABOVE THE LIBYAN SIBYL (ON THE RIGHT)

Photo, Braun, Clément

FIGURE ABOVE THE PERSIAN SIBYL (ON THE LEFT)

Photo Braun, Clément

FIGURE ABOVE THE PERSIAN SIBYL (ON THE RIGHT)



Photo, Braun, Clément

FIGURE ABOVE DANIEL (ON THE LEFT)

Photo, Braun, Clément

FIGURE ABOVE DANIEL (ON THE RIGHT)

Photo, Braun. Clément

FIGURE ABOVE EZEKIEL (ON THE LEFT)

Photo, Braun, Clément

FIGURE ABOVE EZEKIEL (ON THE RIGHT)

Photo, Braun, Clement

FIGURE ABOVE THE SIBYL OF CUMAE (ON THE LEFT)

Photo, Braun, Clément

FIGURE ABOVE THE SIBYL OF CUMAE (ON THE RIGHT)

Photo, Braun, Clément

FIGURE ABOVE THE ERYTHREAN SIBYL (ON THE LEFT)

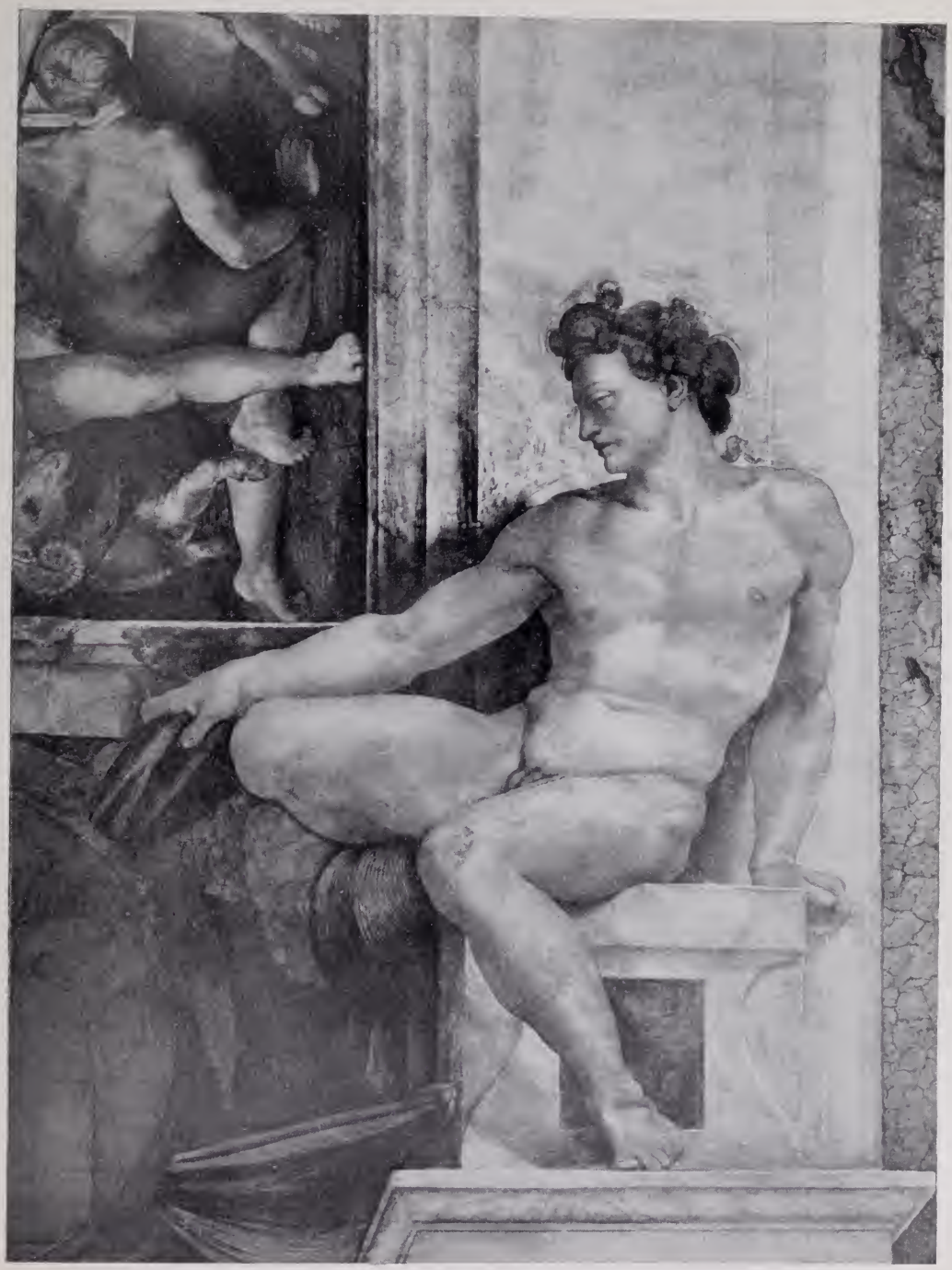


Photo Braun, Clément

FIGURE ABOVE THE ERYTHREAN SIBYL (ON THE RIGHT)

FIGURE ABOVE ESAIAS (ON THE LEFT)

Photo, Braun, Clément

Photo, Braun, Clement

FIGURE ABOVE ESAIAS (ON THE RIGHT)

{Photo, Braun, Clément

FIGURE ABOVE JOEL (ON THE LEFT)

Photo, Braun, Clément

FIGURE ABOVE JOEL (ON THE RIGHT)

Photo, Braun, Clément

FIGURE ABOVE THE DELPHIC SIBYL (ON THE RIGHT)

Photo, Braun, Clément

THE LAST JUDGMENT

Photo, Braun, Clément

THE LAST JUDGMENT (UPPER PART, LEFT SIDE)

Photo, Braun, Clément

THE LAST JUDGMENT (UPPER PART, RIGHT SIDE)

HOLY FAMILY

Photo, Braun, Clément
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